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Chapter VIII.

Education of children. Puberty ceremonies.

855 In the last chapter I have pointed out that infanticide, as practised by the Chaco Indians in certain cases, cannot be explained as a token of a lack of parental feeling in general. The Indian parents love their children, feed them well and try to protect them not only against natural dangers but also against evil spirits by means of body-painting and amulets. To what extent they take care of the well-being of their offspring is best shown by the custom of couvade. Even at those times of the year when the food is scarce I do not believe that the Indians allow their children to suffer from hunger. At the algaroba
855 season again, when there is an abundance of food, the children go on
261 eating from morning till night, and since the food to a great extent consists of fruits more or less indigestible, it is at that time a common thing to see young children of both sexes whose stomachs are abnormally distended so as to make them really paunchy. Gluttony is a characteristic feature of the Chaco Indians during the seasons, but especially of the children.

855 The Chaco Indians bring up their children in complete liberty. Pa-
861 rents are never seen punishing their children for disobedience or faults committed. This is partly due to the fact that the sense of what is proper and permissible is not developed among the Indians in the same way as in civilized societies. The Indian hates restraint and fetters of any kind, he wants to be free and independent himself and grants his children the same liberty. The latter, on the other hand, from an Indian point of view very seldom appear punishable, since they easily accommodate themselves to the customs and moral views of the tribe. An Indian boy may rob or do some other harm to a stranger, be he an Indian of a foreign tribe or a white man, but he will, from a natural instinct, respect the property of a

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855 861 868 member of his own tribe. In the training of the Indian children the power of example and the natural desire to imitate has the most effect. It is interesting to note how the young boys constantly watch the occupations of the elder men and how easily in this way they acquire the necessary skill in the same occupations, above all in fishing and hunting. When the Toba boy is about six or seven years old, his father makes him a small bow and arrows with which he frequently practises shooting, thus at an early age acquiring dexterity in managing the weapon. Similarly the girls follow their mothers everywhere, down to the river, to the fields, and the forest, keenly watching how she does her work and soon learning to do the same.

881 As far as I know, no particular ceremonies are performed among the Choroti and Mataco with young boys at the attainment of puberty, nor do the present day Tobas in Bolivia practise any ceremonies of this kind. According to some ancient writers, the Tobas of the 18th century practised certain ceremonies with young boys, consisting of a peculiar arrangement of their hair and in pricking them on the body with sharp-pointed bones, but since the particular purpose of these ceremonies was to initiate them into the profession of a warrior, I shall reserve the details till later on, in treating of Indian warfare.

On the other hand, when a young girl has her first menstruation and becomes marriageable, the incident is celebrated among all Chaco tribes with certain feasts, dances, beer-drinking, and purely religious rites. In order fully to understand these ceremonies it is necessary to know the ideas which the Indians entertain about the mysterious phenomena of puberty. It is by no means sufficient to say that the puberty ceremonies simply serve to initiate the girl into her coming sexual life; their significance is much deeper.

881 941 [821] The physiological process which causes the menstruation of the women, incomprehensible as it seems to the Indian, strikes him as something extremely mysterious and must needs give rise to certain superstitious beliefs. Thus both the Tobas and the other Chaco tribes seem to have the idea that this strange phenomenon is caused, or at any rate influenced, by the new moon. Moreover, since the menstrual periods, and especially the first menses, are as a rule connected with certain nervous disorders and other alterations in the physical condition of the woman, it is naturally thought that during these critical days she is seriously exposed to the influence of evil spirits. At the same time, of course, owing to the awakening sexual desire, the relationship between this physiological

845 766 A child born dead is buried immediately without any ceremony. It is considered as waste matter just as is the placenta. On the other hand, if the child dies after having lived for a few hours it is buried according to the traditional funeral rites.

846 262 After the birth of their child both father and mother continue to take various precautions of a magical nature in order not to undermine the child's health. They abstain from certain foods, among others, from the flesh of the tatú [type of armadillo--Translator] and of the iguana. All infractions of food "tabus" will cause the child to have stomach trouble. Certain "tabus" last from one to two years. 834 The husband abstains from all sexual intercourse with his wife until such time as the baby has teeth.

856 Some practices have, in the Indians' opinion, the magical power of influencing the child's growth. Thus, the parents may ask a woman who has beautiful hair to cut off a lock and rub their little daughter's head with it. A person whose limbs are very well shaped will be asked to massage the legs of a child. In general, parents are pleased when well formed persons take their baby in arms to communicate their good looks.

853 A woman will feed only her own child and refuses to breast feed any other baby. Nevertheless one can see, on occasion, grandmothers giving the breast to a baby, but this is only to [11] pacify them and not to nourish them as some assert. When the child is about a year old, his mother chews up grains of boiled corn and introduces [862] this paste, with her fingers, into the little one's mouth. In order to pacify their babies, whom my presence frightened, the mothers would keep feeding them continually. Likewise when a child would make a fuss in church, its mother would start by patting it gently and saying "hush," "hush," "hush" to it in order to calm it down, but if this measure did not bring about the necessary effect she would put it to breast.

855 I do not remember ever seeing a man or a woman mistreat a child. The following episode, which I observed in a Mataco village, may be considered typical. A little child about two years old was screaming madly without apparent cause. His mother jumped him up and down on her knees in the hope of pacifying him; then she closed his mouth with her hand. As the little fellow continued to scream

855 and carry on, his mother essayed to see whether dragging him off to some distance from the hut would help, but he struggled and rolled on the ground. Finally she controlled him and, without any short temperedness, and laughing all the time she set him down a few yards from the house where the child continued to cry but did not dare to return.

857 861 This same gentleness and absence of brutality can be observed among playing children. Thus, on numerous occasions I have been able to observe little children vying for possession of a small ball; they would push and charge into each other, but never maliciously or violently. Mataco education stresses sweetness and gentleness and a [157] violent man or one of evil character (witsax) [? Translator] inspires them with fear and disgust. From the tenderest age children learn to share their food. When I used to distribute candy the children would never fail to let the absent ones know so that they might have a part of what was being given.

Abortion and Infanticide

847 Abortion and infanticide used to be practiced by the Matacos on a large scale, as also among the other Chaco tribes. According to my informants, a woman has an abortion when she is pregnant and not married; when she has been abandoned by her husband or, after a quarrel with him, for vengeance. Many women undergo abortions when they are [12] pregnant for the first time, in the hope that such action will make future deliveries easier.

It is very generally held that the Chaco Indian women use powerful drugs to cause abortion, but this is doubtless merely legendary. The aids of which they make use are purely mechanical. During the fifth month after conception they get a friend to pound them on their abdomen until the blood begins to flow.

Marriage

832 In amorous relations the young girls appear to take more of the initiative than do the men. They easily become provocative and make